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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000853

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/INS AND DRL
LONDON FOR POL - GURNEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PTER PGOV NP

SUBJECT: NEPAL: KILLERS OF TWO MAOIST STUDENTS REMAIN
UNIDENTIFIED

REF: A. KATHMANDU 0795

1B. KATHMANDU 0770

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Although the Maoist-affiliated student union continues to blame the security forces for the killings of two of its members in April, most human rights groups and mainstream politicians from the area believe that the pair were likely murdered by others in the insurgents' student wing. Some senior police officials, on the other hand, have suggested that the two may have been killed because of local anti-Maoist vigilantism. End summary.

DECAPITATED STUDENT BODIES

12. (U) The leadership of the Maoist-affiliated All-Nepal National Independent Student Union - Revolutionary (ANNISU-R) has accused the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) of killing ANNISU-R members Bhupendra Timilsena and Prit Kumar Moktan in the city of Hetauda in the south-central district of Makwanpur. The decapitated body of Timilsena was found in Hetauda on April 20, while the headless and mutilated corpse of Moktan was discovered one week later (Ref A). The two had been reported missing on April 20 after having been arrested, the ANNISU-R alleged, by RNA soldiers. A third student who had disappeared at the same time, Ramesh Sapkota, remains missing. The ANNISU-R called an April 29 general strike, or bandh, to protest the killings (Ref B). Findings from an investigation into the incidents, conducted under Home Ministry auspices, were forwarded to the Home Minister on May 8, according to Ministry Joint Secretary Naranjan Baral. He declined to disclose the results of the investigation until after the Minister has had a chance to review it.

INTRA-PARTY STRIFE, LOCAL REVENGE
SUGGESTED AS POSSIBLE MOTIVES

13. (SBU) Human rights groups, local politicians, and police cast doubt on the ANNISU-R version of events. Krishna Gautam of national human rights NGO INSEC (affiliated with the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist, the largest political party) questioned ANNISU-R allegations that the pair had been arrested by the RNA. Instead, Gautam said, local residents believe that the two had more likely been detained and killed by villagers angered by the insurgent students' past behavior. (Note: Senior police officials in Kathmandu have offered the same theory. End note.) A local reporter based in Hetauda said that none of the villagers reported having seen the students with the RNA. Hiranya Lal Shrestha, a member of the Communist Party of Nepal - Marxist Leninist and former Member of Parliament from Makwanpur, speculated that the two may have been killed because of internal rivalries within the Maoist camp. Alternatively, he suggested that the students could have been killed by gangs involved in smuggling marijuana from Makwanpur to India who were angered at the Maoist tax on contraband marijuana. Chief District Officer Pashupati Karmacharya said he was "100 percent sure" that the Maoists themselves killed the two students, alleging the two had a dispute about "money matters" with their fellow cadres before their disappearances. He added that the RNA would have been more likely to shoot the students than to take the trouble of decapitating them. Superintendent of Police Narayan Prasad Bastakoti of the District Police Office stated that an investigation into the two murders is ongoing. The general public now realizes that neither the police nor the RNA was involved in the killings, he asserted, echoing others' speculation that the two were either killed by other Maoists or by members of a criminal gang. The local chapter of Amnesty International said it had no information on the incident, while the National Human Rights Commission said it had not received any complaints regarding the killings and had thus not begun an investigation.

COMMENT

14. (SBU) The ANNISU-R, which had initially tried to exploit the grisly killings as an example of RNA brutality, has been uncharacteristically silent since the beginning of May, likely put off by widespread public skepticism--if not outright hostility. We find it particularly telling that local residents, who presumably knew the murder victims best, do not appear particularly sympathetic to the ANNISU-R version of events. While we doubt that the just-concluded inquiry by the Home Ministry will turn up much reliable information either to implicate or exonerate any of the alleged killers, the Maoists' sensationalist charges against the RNA appear to have died a natural death.
MALINOWSKI